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Establishing Confucius Institutes: a tool for promoting China's soft power?

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ABSTRACT

Soft power has become China's new diplomatic tool to spread its influence in today's changing international landscape. The establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs) since 2004 to promote the understanding of Chinese language and culture is a striking example of how the government promotes soft power through cultural means. Through the macro- and micro-level analysis of CIs, this study shows that CIs fail to increase the soft power of China because many countries regard CIs as a propaganda tool and a threat to academic freedom and the local community. It shows that China's soft power is not so attractive in the eyes of receivers. In fact, China's aggressive cultural initiatives through the establishment of CIs have triggered another version of the 'China threat'.

1. Introduction

The rise of China as a global power is undoubtedly one of the major transformations of the post-Cold War international system. There are a lot of figures and facts demonstrating China's rise to economic and political power. However, China's rise has drawn worldwide attention. Western powers and media have propagated the 'China threat' arguments,¹ which claim that China will overthrow the existing world order. In response to the 'China threat' argument, Chinese leaders have identified suitable diplomatic strategies which allay Western concerns to ensure the smooth rise of China. Since the beginning of this new century, Chinese foreign policy has gone through a significant change. Deng Xiaoping's teaching of 'lay low, never take the lead, and bide our time' has been replaced by the concepts of 'peaceful rise' and 'harmonious world' in the Hu–Wen era. These two concepts show that 'China will try to avoid military conflict with neighboring countries and will respect the international order in the course of its rise.'² Following former President Hu Jintao's foreign policy line, the central government adopted a soft power approach that aims to promote Chinese culture internationally. Since 2000 the term 'soft power', coined by Joseph Nye, has gained considerable currency in China's official and scholarly community. The concept of soft power is popular in China because it resonates with the idea of peaceful rise and harmonious world. It helps 'fend off the China threat argument, and to assure the world about the peaceful nature of a rising China.'³ According to Nye, soft power refers to 'the ability to get what you

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¹Herbert Yee and Ian Storey, eds, *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality* (London: Routledge Curzon Press, 2002); Rex Li, 'The China threat: theoretic perspectives and policy implications', *Journal of Contemporary China* 8(22), (1999), p. 445.

²Baohui Zhang, 'Chinese foreign policy in transition: trends and implications', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 2(39), (2010), pp. 39–68.

³Hongyi Lai, 'Introduction: the soft power concept and a rising China', in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu, eds, *China's Soft Power and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

want through attraction rather than coercion or payment.⁴ Culture, political values and foreign policies are identified by Nye as three resources of soft power. In China, however, the Chinese elites emphasize 'culture as a source of national power'.⁵ In particular, cultural tools have become one of the primary tools for China to cultivate its soft power. Although China is experiencing power transition, there is no sign that the new leaders will overlook this soft power approach. President Xi Jinping puts forth the concept of the 'Chinese dream' and states clearly that 'the concept of the Chinese dream and the path of peaceful development are consistent with each other'.⁶ In Xi's view, the path of peaceful development is the one and only way to realize the Chinese dream. The Chinese government has placed soft power high on their foreign policy agenda. They believe that soft power is extremely important for improving China's image abroad and dampening the perception of China as a threat, which in turn lays a good foundation for China's peaceful rise in the international community and contributes to constructing the Chinese dream.

It has been clearly documented that the Chinese government has made concerted efforts to adopt soft power diplomacy through cultural means at both the policy formation and implementation levels. The soft power initiatives are carried out prominently by government agencies, which include the establishment of cultural centers and schools in foreign countries, implementing international academic exchanges, transnational expansion of national media, playing national image films, and organizing numerous concerts and exhibitions overseas. One of the most striking examples is the establishment of Confucius Institutes (hereafter CIs) in foreign countries to promote learning of Chinese language and culture to the world. Since their establishment in 2004, CIs have gained momentum and expanded rapidly. On the one hand, China's ever growing prominence on the international stage has made people around the world eager to know more about China; 'Increasingly, mastery of the Chinese language is seen as an indispensable tool for understanding China'.⁷ Hence, it has sped up the establishment of the CIs. On the other hand, CIs serve as a diplomatic platform to project China's soft power and have attracted a high level of attention. The concept of CIs has been written into the 'Resolution' of the Sixth Plenum of the 17th CCP Central Committee.⁸ By the end of 2014, Chinese party leaders and government officials had participated in the CIs' activities hundreds of times and members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau, which is the most important decision-making body of China, have stopped by CIs more than 80 times and guided the work there. President Xi has paid several visits to CIs over the past few years, demonstrating that he does not downplay CI programs. Instead, he goes to great lengths to manage the CI project so as to promote soft power which has been rooted in Xi's concept of the Chinese dream.⁹ Hence, it shows that the CIs serve as an important lens to illustrate China's pursuit of soft power. For this reason, the study of CIs is conducive to providing a better understanding of China's soft power and its implications for the rise of China.

Over the past decade, the mainstream literature of China's soft power by and large focused on the major tools China has used to cultivate soft power and polish its image abroad. These tools include policy discourse (especially 'peaceful rise'), charm offensive foreign policy, economic diplomacy and trade, cultural and public diplomacy, and so on. The establishment of CIs is one of the frequently explored empirical cases that are put under the framework of cultural and public diplomacy in order to examine the effectiveness of China's soft power. Some scholars have argued that China's soft power is rising in developing countries due to Beijing's impressive cultural initiatives (including the construction of CIs).

⁴Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. x.

⁵How to improve China's soft power?, *People's Daily*, (11 March 2010), available at: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6916487.htm> (accessed 12 November 2011).

⁶Wang Yi, 'Jianchi hepingfazhan, shixian minzufuxing zhongguomeng' ['Adhere to peaceful development and achieve national rejuvenation of Chinese dream'], *Xuexi shibao* [Study Times], (17 February 2014), available at: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0217/c40531-24378766.html> (accessed 23 February 2014).

⁷Hongyi Lai, 'China's cultural diplomacy: going for soft power', in Lai and Lu, eds, *China's Soft Power and International Relations*, p. 91.

⁸The full text of the Third Plenary Session of 18th CPC Congress Report, *Xinhuanet*, (14 November 2013), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/house/tj/2013-11-14/c_118121513.htm (accessed 15 November 2013).

⁹Xij Jinping: kongzixueyuan shuyu zhongguo yeshuyu shijie' ['Xij Jinping: Confucius Institute belongs to China as well as to the world'], *Xinhuanet*, (27 September 2014), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-09/27/c_1112652079.htm (accessed 27 September 2014).

They think that China's improved soft power helps reduce the 'China threat' and makes China become an appealing partner, which is conducive to China's peaceful rise. They think that the establishment of CIs can enhance China's soft power representation as it has triggered the 'Chinese fever' in some regions based on various case studies.¹⁰ However, many scholars argue that the establishment of CIs could not boost China's soft power. They think that 'it is a wrong standard for measuring CIs' success from the standpoint of expanding Chinese soft power and it should be understood as a tool of cultural diplomacy or public diplomacy with Chinese characteristics'.¹¹ These studies think that CIs have a political agenda and serve as the propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because CIs are under the auspices of the Party and the state.¹² Most of the existing literature argues that CIs' failure in promoting China's soft power is attributed to China's unbalanced soft power resources with affluent traditional culture but disadvantaged political conditions, especially the non-democratic power.¹³ They argue that the image of CCP and Chinese authoritarianism, diplomatic relations with dictators, domestic problems, emerging Chinese nationalism and China's assertiveness in its foreign policy are impediments to boosting China's soft power.¹⁴

Since the Chinese leadership geared CIs towards national soft power rhetorically and theoretically, previous literatures never doubt the connection between CIs and soft power. They take it for granted that CIs will increase China's soft power. They measured CIs' effectiveness for China's soft power either through looking at the increase of CIs worldwide or examining the responses of targeted foreign audiences. They came to this conclusion without paying careful attention to the way China carries out the CI project and China's motivations behind the establishment of CIs. Or they only partially examined the micro-level factors (CIs in targeted countries) and barely considered the macro-level factors (CIs' distribution, management and operation worldwide). However, this study is not going to follow this logic to measure the effectiveness of CIs. Instead, it doubts whether the connection between CIs and soft power really exists. The purpose of this study examines whether China uses CIs to expand its national soft power. The research questions are as follows. (1) What are the functions of CIs? (2) What are the motivations behind the establishment of CIs? (3) How do CIs fit into the definition of soft power? (4) What are the implications of CIs for China's soft power and foreign policy? In order to answer these questions, this study will use data collected from multiple sources. It includes documentation (official documents, governments publications, annual reports of CIs, scholarship literatures etc.), participant observations in CI classrooms, and semi-structured interviews with directors and faculty members of CIs. Participant observations mainly took place in the CI of Kogakuin University and the CI of Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan from May 2010 to March 2012. Interviews with *Hanban* officials and CI faculties were intermittently conducted in China, Japan, the US and the UK from June 2010 to June 2014. For methods, in order to fill the research gap, this article conducts a comprehensive analysis of CIs at both the macro level and the micro level. The macro-level analysis focuses on the geographical distribution of CIs and on the operation as a whole while the micro-level focuses on the operation of individual CIs. Through systematic analysis, this article argues that CIs have not been a tool for enhancing China's soft

¹⁰Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 2–5; Sheng Ding and Robert A. Saunders, 'Talking up China: an analysis of China's rising cultural power and global promotion of the Chinese language', *East Asia* 2(23), (2006), pp. 3–33.

¹¹James F. Paradise, 'China and international harmony: the role of Confucius Institutes in bolstering Beijing's soft power', *Asian Survey* 4(49), (2009), pp. 647–669; Falk Hartig, 'Confucius Institutes and the rise of China', *Journal of Chinese Political Sciences* 17, (2012), pp. 53–76.

¹²Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship* (New York: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008); Jocelyn Chey, 'Chinese soft power: cultural diplomacy and the Confucius Institutes', *The Sydney Papers* 20(1), (2008), pp. 32–46; Kingsley Edney, 'Soft power and Chinese propaganda system', *Journal of Contemporary China* 21(78), (2012), pp. 899–914; Don Starr, 'Chinese language education in Europe: the Confucius Institutes', *European Journal of Education* 44(1), (2009), pp. 65–82.

¹³Ingrid d'Hooghe, *The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe: Beijing's Public Diplomacy Puzzle*, (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2010), p. 32; Gill Bates and Yanzhong Huang, 'Sources and limits of Chinese soft power', *Survival* 2(48), (2006), p. 30.

¹⁴Mingjiang Li, 'Domestic sources of China's soft power approach', *China Security* 2(5), (2009), pp. 34–49; also see Mingjiang Li, ed., *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

power. This is because the operation of CIs can hardly fit into the definition of soft power. Besides, the economic, political and diplomatic imperatives behind this project overshadow China's attractiveness. The rest of this article is organized into four sections. Section II is an overview of the establishment of CIs and examines whether CIs fit into soft power. Section III provides a comprehensive analysis of the distribution pattern, management, characteristics and operation of CIs, discussing the research findings and implications. Section IV presents the controversies and concerns over the establishment of CI. Section V is the conclusion.

2. The establishment of Confucius Institutes and their incorporation of soft power

In practice, establishing CIs in foreign countries has become China's main effort to enhance soft power. CI is a non-profit public institution that aims to promote Chinese language and culture. It typically partners with academic institutions or other organizations through which it can offer language teaching services and hold Chinese culture promoting activities. They are operated under the auspices of the Office of Chinese Language Council International, which is called *Hanban* in Chinese and is under the authority of the Ministry of Education. *Hanban* is governed by a leading group made up of representatives from 12 state ministries and government agencies.¹⁵ After establishing a pilot CI in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in June 2004, the first CI was established on 21 November 2004 in Seoul, Republic of Korea and many more have been established since in all five continents. By the end of 2014, more than 475 CIs and the extension form of 851 Confucius Classrooms had been established or formally contracted in over 120 countries and regions. According to *Hanban*, there are many overseas inquiries concerning the setting up of CIs. In 2013, *Hanban* published 'The Development Plan of Confucius Institutes (2012–2020)' and planned to establish 1,000 CIs by 2020. In order to manage this project well, *Hanban* established the CI Headquarters (two names, one organization with *Hanban*) in Beijing in 2005 and the CI conference has been held annually in Beijing since then. All CIs have certain commonalities, including their pledge to abide by the 'Constitution and By Law' and requirements laid down by *Hanban*. However, there are considerable variations among CIs. For example, the CI at Waseda University in Japan is research-oriented while the CI in Los Angeles is culture-oriented. Each CI takes advantage of its own uniqueness to develop rich and diverse educational and cultural activities. In this way, CIs have gradually formed their own teaching modes and become an important place for people to learn Chinese language and understand Chinese culture. *Hanban* provides the initiative fund for each new CI and supports it with an annual budget. Funds are used to purchase teaching materials and to pay the salaries of one or two Chinese instructors who agree to reside in the host institution. While the Chinese partner supplies the teaching staff and materials, the host university is responsible for providing accommodation, infrastructure and administrative support. Two directors from each institute co-administer the CI's activities and operation. Since the establishment of CIs, the Chinese government has been heavily financing the CI programs, dispatching teachers and volunteers to CIs, training local teachers and supplying learning materials (see Table 1). This is attributed to Beijing's incorporation of soft power and its desire to promote China's soft power through the CIs.

The concept of soft power was coined by Joseph Nye, who refers to 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment'.¹⁶ According to Nye, the tangibility of the resources and the nature of behavior distinguish soft power from hard power. As depicted in Table 2, soft power resources come from a country's culture, political values and foreign policy whereas the spectrum of behavior varies from command to co-opt.¹⁷ Command power utilizes the behavior of coercion, inducement, force, sanctions, payments and bribes whereas co-opt power relies on the

¹⁵Those 12 state ministries and government agencies are the General Office of the State Council, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, the State Council Information Office, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce, the State Development and Reform Commission, the State Language Committee, the State Press and Publications Administration, and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

¹⁶Nye, *Soft Power*, p. x.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 2; and see Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

Table 1. Government investment in CIs.

Name of project/year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total CI & CC	122	226	305	554	691	858	935	1,086	1,326
Dispatched teachers and volunteers	2,054	2,977	4,000	4,800	6,099	6,815	11,000	14,400	15,500
Presented teaching materials	590,000	813,000	1,300,000	4,300,000	400,000	2,720,000	380,000	410,000	600,000
Local training teachers	15,896	16,782	16,512	23,000	10,000	32,319	6,229	5,720	40,000
Total expenditure (currency: in \$1,000)	56,700	74,494	132,717	198,977	137,761	164,103	196,330	278,371	300,265

Source: Annual Final Report of CI (2006–2014), *Hanban*, available at: <http://www.hanban.edu.cn>.

behaviors of agenda-setting and attractiveness. The most likely resources are culture, values, policies and institutions. The hard power sphere of behavior consists of coercion and inducement. Coercion refers to the threat or use of force and enforcement of sanctions to alter desirable behavior. It is often referred to as the 'stick' analogy. Coercion is an essential component of foreign policy. Inducement refers to the use of a 'carrot' to bribe and influence desirable behavior. It is an essential element of hard power because it requires less expenditure of more costly resources required to influence behavior by coercion. Nye's concept reminded policy makers to pay much more attention to the use of soft power and attractive resources of a nation. But there are defects in this popular buzzword which make it not persuasive enough. It is difficult to say power is 'soft' or 'hard', as this is determined by the receivers. For example, although American popular culture is regarded as a critical soft power resource, people in Iraq and North Korea might not view it as soft power. Hence, the US attraction provides little help for Washington to do what it wants. In fact, Nye's analytical framework ignored the fact that the attraction is defined differently by the receivers and lies in the particular social context.

Table 2. Spectrum of hard power and soft power.

	Scope of hard power		Scope of soft power	
Spectrum of behavior	Coercion	Inducement	Agenda setting	Attraction
Most likely resource	Command Force Sanctions	Payment Bribes	Co-opt Institution	Value Culture Policy

Source: Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 2.

Whether a power source is soft or hard depends on the perception and feelings of various actors in specific situations ... in international politics, the soft or hard effectiveness of a certain power resource is a relative perception; it depends on the feelings of various actors in specific situations.¹⁸

Therefore, soft power in this study not only deals with resources and behavior but also social context, which is an important ingredient for measuring Chinese soft power in the case of CIs.

Since the publication of Nye's *Bound to Lead*, the term 'soft power' immediately attracted the attention of policy advisers and academics in China.¹⁹ The discussion of soft power in China gained more momentum in policy circles when Hu Jintao became Party General Secretary in 2002. There were several regular

¹⁸Yongnian Zheng and Chi Zhang, 'Guojizhengzhi zhong de ruanlilang yiji dui zhongguo ruanlilang de guancha' ['Soft power in international politics and observations on China's soft power'], *Shijiezhengzhi yu jingji* [World Politics and Economics] 7, (2007), pp. 6–13.

¹⁹Joel Wuthnow, 'The concept of soft power in China's strategic discourse', *Issues & Studies* 44(2), (2008), pp. 1–28; Mingjiang Li, 'Soft power in Chinese discourse: popularity and prospects', in Li, ed., *Soft Power*, pp. 21–44.

collective study sessions held for members of the Political Bureau which touched upon the topic of soft power and discussed national strategies for promoting Chinese culture internationally.²⁰ After years of intellectual debates, discussions in academic community, and popular media dissemination, the term was finally incorporated into the highest-level policy document on 15 October 2007. When delivering his keynote speech at the CCP's 17th National Congress, Hu called for 'enhancing culture as part of the soft power of China'.²¹ President Xi Jinping would surely follow this soft power line and reinforce it into a new stage. This is because President Xi believes that 'China's pursuit of soft power not only reduces the China threat, but also helps the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the realization of Chinese dream'.²² When delivering a speech at a group study session of members of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, Xi vowed that 'efforts are needed to promote China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world'.²³ It is clear that soft power, whether in a top leader's speeches or in official reports, is used to describe Chinese culture. Following this policy direction, Beijing has incorporated a number of cultural efforts which include the establishment of CIs into the soft power strategy. Xu Lin, executive chief of the CI programming, said that CIs have become Chinese soft power's 'brightest brand'.²⁴

3. Findings of the macro- and micro-level analysis of CIs and its implications

In this section we conduct a comprehensive analysis on CIs. The macro-level analysis focuses on the characteristics of general distribution and operations of CIs worldwide in order to examine the imperatives embedded in the CI project while the micro-level analysis focuses on the programs and activities of individual CIs to investigate their soft power behaviors. Findings are illustrated below.

3.1. The macro-level analysis

3.1.1. Reflecting China's diverse emphases and orientation in foreign policy.

The distribution pattern of CIs reflects China's diverse emphases and orientation in foreign policy due to its competing international identities of being 'a major power, a regional power, an emerging power, and a developing nation'.²⁵ The official guidelines of China's foreign policy state that 'major powers are the key, surrounding areas are the first priority, developing countries are the foundation, and multi-lateral forums are the important stage'.²⁶ The distribution pattern of CIs reflects this overall diplomatic layout. Figure 1 shows the growth of CIs at the regional level; most CIs are found in the continent of America (632), which is followed by Europe (370), Asia (182) and Oceania (80 CIs concentrated in four countries). In Africa, the number of CIs has increased rapidly from six in 2006 to 60 in 2014. The spread of CIs is the fastest in the US, followed by some European countries. As of late 2014, countries having the most CIs established or with agreements in hand to do so were advanced great powers like the US (542), the United Kingdom (134), Australia (60), Italy (45), Canada (41), Thailand (31), South Korea (28), Russia (23), Japan (21), Germany (20) and France (19).

²⁰Weihong Zhang, 'China's cultural future: from soft power to comprehensive national power', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16(4), (2010), pp. 383–402.

²¹The full text of 17th CCP Congress Report', *Xinhuanet*, (24 October 2007), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/24/content_6938568.htm (accessed 20 October 2012).

²²Xi Jinping: jianshe shehuizhuyi wenhuaqianguo, zhuoli tigao guojia wenhua ruanshili' ['Constructing a strong socialism cultural power and enhancing national cultural soft power'], *Xinhuanet*, (31 December 2013), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-12/31/c_118788013.htm (accessed 31 December 2013).

²³Xi Jinping: China to promote cultural soft power', *Xinhuanet*, (1 January 2014), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/01/c_125941955.htm (accessed 1 January 2014).

²⁴'2006: kongxixueyuan shi zhongguo ruanshili de zuiliang pinpai' ['2006: Confucius Institute is the brightest brand of China's soft power'], *Xinhuanet*, (1 January 2007), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2007-01/01/content_5556842.htm (accessed 23 December 2011).

²⁵He Wei, 'Challenges await China this decade', *People's Daily*, (6 January 2011), available at: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91342/7251740.html> (accessed 12 January 2012).

²⁶The full text of Jiang Zemin's Report at the 16th CCP Congress', *Xinhuanet*, (17 November 2002), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-11/17/content_693542.htm (accessed 12 January 2012).

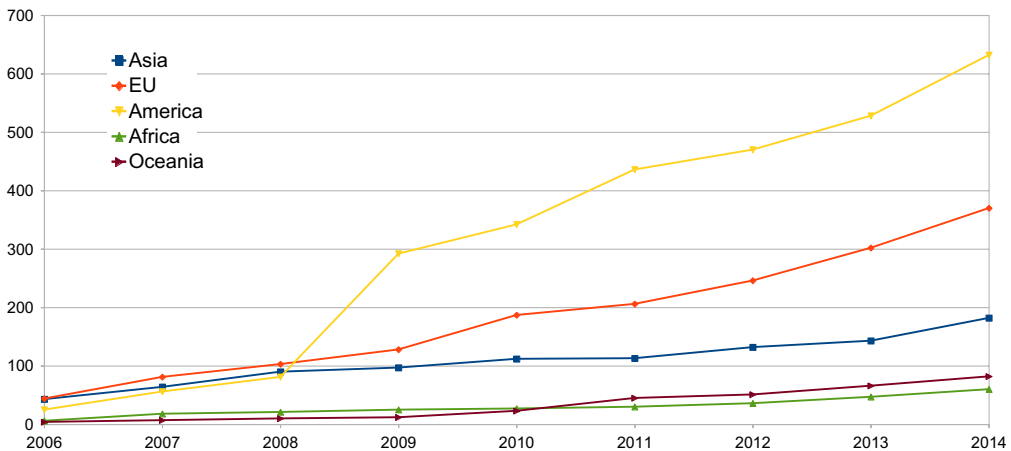


Figure 1. Growth of CIs in the world. Source: Annual Final Report of CI (2006–2014), Hanban, available at: <http://www.hanban.edu.cn>.

According to an official from the Ministry of Education, the establishment of CIs should adhere to the policy of ‘building friendship and partnership with neighbors’ (*yu ling wei shan, yi ling wei ban*), which is China’s neighborhood foreign policy.²⁷ China’s local governments encourage educational institutes to fully utilize their geographical advantages to partner with institutes in neighboring countries. Higher institutes in Yunnan province established CIs in Bangladesh, Thailand and Sri Lanka. The central committee of Yunnan province stated that ‘the adoption of “go-out” strategy in higher education is to adopt the diplomatic strategy of “building friendship and partnership with neighbors and have peaceful development”’. It is beneficial to the construction of a harmonious and secure environment’.²⁸ Similarly, institutes in the northwestern province of Qinghai and Shanxi establish CIs in countries in Central Asia. Institutes in Xinjiang have established six CIs in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and two Chinese language centers in Kazakhstan. Guangxi’s institutes cooperated with Thailand’s partners for this CI project. In sum, the distribution pattern of CIs reflects both the importance of diplomatic relations and strong interests that China places in different countries.

3.1.2. Strengthening national identity and national cohesiveness.

The establishment of CIs plays an important role in strengthening national identity, national dignity and national cohesiveness through studying Chinese language and culture.²⁹ Language teaching and cultural promotion are more than mere tools of public diplomacy. In fact, they are the means by which people define themselves and others. For thousands of years, Chinese rulers have laid great emphasis on the unification of language as part of their driver for a unified nation. CCP leaders believe that culture is the resource of national cohesion and have utilized language and culture to unite the overseas Chinese and keep their Chinese identity. Today, the promotion of Chinese language and culture, which is facilitated by the establishment of CIs, carries the same goal, and the political objectives are even more explicit than before.³⁰ The target audience of CIs not only includes foreigners but also the

²⁷Jiaoyubu he qiaoban jieshao shijie hanyu dahui choubei gongzuo de youguan qingkuang’ [‘The Ministry of Education and the Oversea Chinese Affairs Office introduce the preparation for the World Chinese Language Conference’], available at: <http://www.china.com.cn/market/shihan/420235.htm> (accessed 15 October 2015).

²⁸Zhonggong yunnan shengwei, yunnansheng renmin zhengfu guanyu jiakuai tuijin gaodengyuanxiao shishi “zouchuqu” zhanlve tigao gaodengjiaoyu guojihua shuiping de ruogan yijian’ [‘Some opinions on improving the “go out” strategy of higher institutes and enhance the level of higher education’s internationalization by Yunnan Provincial Committee of the CPC, People’s Government of Yunnan Province’], *Yunnan zhengbao* [The Bulletin of People’s Government of Yunnan Province] 14, (2006), pp. 31–33.

²⁹Peiyuan Yu, ‘Lun xinshiqi de wenhua tongyizhanxian’ [‘On the cultural united front in the new era’], *Shanghaishi shehuizhuyi xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Shanghai Socialist Academy] 2, (2002), pp. 13–21.

³⁰Dali L. Yang, ‘Language and the politics of identity in China in the age of globalization’, in I. Yuan, ed., *Is There a Greater China Identity? Security and Economic Dilemma* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations of National Chengchi University, 2007), pp. 159–172, 387–389.

Chinese diaspora. Former Chinese President Jiang Zemin said that establishing overseas Chinese schools 'is an important approach for tightening our relationships with overseas Chinese and increasing our influence'.³¹ President Hu Jintao also stated in the party report that 'culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion'.³² CIs are 'the virtual sense of cultural and ethnic pride'.³³ Consequently, a large number of CIs are located in countries with a large overseas Chinese population, such as the US, Canada, South Korea and Thailand, and most of them are settled in major world cities, many of which host well-developed Chinatowns. They organize activities related to traditional culture in order to connect older and younger overseas Chinese to China. Some CIs run special classes and organize summer camps in China for ethnic Chinese children to rediscover their Chinese roots.³⁴ The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council incorporated the development of CIs into the overseas Chinese education plan. CIs 'seem to be very effective in providing a focal point for the Chinese diaspora and a way of energizing that diaspora community'.³⁵ At present, CIs have not been fully integrated into foreign communities.³⁶ Instead, overseas Chinese networks have positively contributed to the rapid expansion of CIs around the world as they provide human resources and help implement CI projects in foreign institutes.³⁷ As a result, in some communities, 'it is the overseas Chinese, rather than foreigners being the biggest Chinese learning population'.³⁸ In this sense, 'the development of CIs is China's most widely coordinated long-term collective effort to articulate a Chinese identity and brand it on the world stage'.³⁹

3.1.3. Enhancing national image.

The establishment of CIs is part of the Chinese government's efforts to enhance China's positive image. CIs are regarded as 'cultural scouts' that woo people around the world, 'in the hope that more and more people will understand China, be friends of China and become pro-China'.⁴⁰ Over the past few decades, China has been demonized by Western powers and media regarding China's one-party political system, human right issues and the treatment of Tibet, Taiwan and the Tian'anmen incident.⁴¹ The 'China threat theory' propagated by the Western media not only hurts the national image of China, but also makes China 'face a more complex international environment and withstand more external pressure'.⁴² Under this circumstance, 'a good international image is pertinent to the Chinese regime since it is one of the few governments ruled by the Communist Party, which goes against the world trend of democratization'.⁴³ The adoption of cultural diplomacy through the establishment of CIs appears to be a good approach

³¹Shih-Ping Fan, 'The meaning of diplomacy policy on China's present overseas Chinese affairs', *International Area Studies Review* 13(2), (2010), pp. 235–258.

³²'The full text of 17th CCP Congress Report', *Xinhuanet*.

³³Liu Na, *The Role of Confucius Institutes in Chinese Heritage Language–Community Language (HL–CL) Schools: Stake Holder's View*, Ph.D. dissertation, Arizona State University, 2010, p. 238; Zhang Guizhen *et al.*, *Zhongguo duiwai chuanbo [China's Foreign Communication]* (Beijing: The Press of Chinese Media and Communication University, 2006), p. 125.

³⁴Interview with CI directors, September 2011, UK. Also see William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 152.

³⁵Nicholas J. Cull, 'China's propaganda and influence operations, its intelligence activities that target the US and its resulting impacts on US national security', *US–China Economic and Security Review Commission* 30, (2009), available at: http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2009hearings/written_testimonies/09_04_30_wrts/09_04_30_cull_statement.pdf (accessed 22 January 2012).

³⁶Interview with CI director, June 2010, US; interview with CI director, November 2011, Japan; interview with CI director, September 2011, UK; also see 'Aodaliya zhongguo de lengsikao' ['Cold thinking on Austria's Chinese fever'], *Lianhezaobao*, (10 November 2013), available at: <http://www.zaobao.com/news/world/story20131110-274635/page/0/2> (accessed 10 November 2013).

³⁷Interview with CI director, November 2011, Japan.

³⁸Liu Na, *The Role of Confucius Institutes in Chinese Heritage Language–Community Language (HL–CL) Schools*, pp. 239–242.

³⁹Michael Barrs, *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power* (London and New York: Asian Arguments, Zed Books, 2011), p. 76.

⁴⁰Guo-qiang Liu, 'Confucius Institutes and China's national identity', paper presented at the Proceedings of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia 2012 Conference, Curtin University, Perth, W. Australia, 12–14 November 2012.

⁴¹Xiguang Li and Kang Liu, *Yaomohua zhongguo de beihou [Behind Demonizing China]* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe [China Social Sciences Press], 1996).

⁴²'Respond calmly to China threat theory', *People's Daily*, (10 April 2012), available at: http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2012-04/10/content_25105939.htm (accessed 20 July 2012).

⁴³Wanfa Zhang, 'Tapping soft power: managing China's peaceful rise and the implications for the world', in Sujian Guo and Shiping Hua, eds, *New Dimensions of Chinese Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2007), pp. 109–131.

to enhance China's national image. CIs, named after 'China's oldest and most famous philosopher',⁴⁴ project a positive image to attract audiences abroad. Labeling the institutes as 'Confucius' is not merely a cultural symbol or a branding issue. It also carries a diplomatic implication. To establish the network of CIs is the government's attempt to use Confucius to represent Chinese culture and the Confucius ideologies on peacefulness and harmony to 'disarm fears [abroad] about its rapid rise'.⁴⁵ It concerns national image. The data of the Pew Global Attitudes Project suggest that views towards China in large Western countries such as the US, Germany and France and in neighboring countries such as Japan became less favorable from 2005 to 2015.⁴⁶ These countries appear to be the places where CIs are established to erase the misunderstanding of people in foreign communities and enhance China's national image. Figure 1 shows that CIs began to grow fast from 2008 when the torch relay of the Beijing Olympics encountered boycotts and protests in many countries.

3.1.4. Increasing economic benefits.

The establishment of CIs involves commercial considerations. CIs can 'facilitate business activities'.⁴⁷ An extensive literature shows that language and cultural familiarity can exert effects on the economy such as trade and foreign direct investment (FDI).⁴⁸ The location of CIs reflects China's mercantile interests in different countries and the economic interests that these countries have in China in return. By the end of 2011, countries which had more CIs were China's top trading partners. They included the US, the UK, South Korea, Russia, Germany, Japan, and Thailand. The commercial imperative is even more evident in Africa and South America, which are the loci of investment and strategic regions for China. After the Beijing Summit of the China–Africa Cooperation Forum was held in 2006, the number of CIs dramatically increased from one to ten within six months in African countries. By the end of 2014, this figure had increased to 60 in 33 African countries. CIs have contributed positively to the volume of exports from China and FDI in the host countries, especially the developing ones.⁴⁹

On the other hand, CIs have not been established in China's traditional ideological allies such as North Korea. There is only one CI established in Cuba, Vietnam and Albania, the only country in Europe with which China maintained relations in the darkest days of Mao. It clearly shows that whether the countries can bring China economic benefits is more important than whether the countries share an ideological similarity with China when establishing CIs. In fact, the CI at the London School of Economics (LSE) focuses exclusively on business Chinese. Some CIs are established and operated in conjunction with foreign corporations and target Chinese language students in the world of business. They are funded by multinational corporations such as British Petroleum, Deloitte, HSBC, Swire and Standard Chartered. China's noted companies exemplified by ZTE Corporation and Huawei Technologies have been partnered with CIs in France. Besides, 'the economic benefit of language promotion is huge when looking at experiences from western countries'.⁵⁰ It is expected that CIs can generate lots of revenues like the Educational Test Service (ETS) such as TOEFL, TOEIC and GRE and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

⁴⁴Randall Peerenboom, 'The fire-breathing dragon and the cute, cuddly panda: the implication of China's rise for developing countries, human rights, and geopolitical stability', *Chicago Journal of International Law* 7(1), (2006), pp. 17–50.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*; interview with the CI director, May 2010, Japan.

⁴⁶Pew Global Attitudes Project, available at: [http://www.pewglobal.org/database/?indicator 1/4 24&survey 1/414&response 1/4 Favorable&mode 1/4 table](http://www.pewglobal.org/database/?indicator%201/4%2024&survey%201/414&response%201/4%20Favorable&mode%201/4%20table) (accessed 22 July 2015).

⁴⁷Interview with Hanban official, September 2010, Japan; interview with CI directors, November 2011, Japan.

⁴⁸D. Boisso and M. Ferrantino, 'Economic distance, cultural distance, and openness in international trade', *Journal of Economic Integration* 12(4), (1997), pp. 456–484; W. K. Hutchinson, 'Does ease of communication increase trade? Commonality of language and bilateral trade', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 49(5), (2002), pp. 544–556; J. Melitz, 'Language and foreign trade', *European Economic Review* 52, (2008), pp. 667–699.

⁴⁹Donald Lien, Chang Hoon Oh and W. Travis Selmier, 'Confucius Institute effects on China's trade and FDI: isn't it delightful when folks afar study hanyu?', *International Review of Economics and Finance* 21, (2012), pp. 147–155.

⁵⁰Duan Yi, 'Yingshili ruanshili lilunkuangjia xia de yuyan wenhua tuiguang he kongzixueyuan' ['Language and cultural promotion and Confucius Institute under the theoretical framework of hard power and soft power'], *Fudan Education Forum* 6(2), (2008), pp. 48–51.

in the West. The increasing number of students enrolled in CIs and taking the Chinese Proficiency Test (*Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*, HSK) has led to a profit earned from the HSK.⁵¹

3.1.5. Promoting 'One-China policy'

The establishment of CIs overseas is to promote the 'one China policy'. The official guidelines of CIs clearly states that 'overseas CIs must abide by the One-China Policy, preserve the independence and unity of the PRC'.⁵² Beijing's goal of marginalizing Taiwan in the battle for global influence is not only in the field of economy and politics but also extended to culture. Both sides use the same spoken language but have different terms to refer to it and have different scripts, namely national language (*guoyu*) in Taiwan and Mandarin (*putonghua*) in China. CI has to 'conduct Chinese language instruction in Mandarin, using Standard Chinese Characters'.⁵³ This requires foreign partners contracted with *Hanban* to abide by Beijing's One-China policy. They are not supposed to have a similar language arrangement with Taiwanese partners or the Taiwan government.⁵⁴ As an informant at a CI said during an interview, 'the first thing the Chinese government had to consider when establishing CI should be the Taiwan issue. Politics always come first'.⁵⁵ At the present time, Taiwan has about 40 Chinese language schools or institutes of higher education to promote Chinese language and culture. An increasing number of foreign students come to Taiwan for all levels of language study.⁵⁶ In order to 'counteract China's push for greater soft power',⁵⁷ Taiwan, since 2011, has established cultural centers known as Taiwan Academy in New York, Los Angeles, Houston, followed by more in Europe and Asia. These cultural centers 'promote Taiwanese-flavored Mandarin and traditional Chinese characters, and also sponsor research on Taiwan-related topics'.⁵⁸ The establishment of Taiwan Academy overseas is cultural diplomacy to further Taiwan's interests abroad. Scholars at Taiwan institutes interviewed said that Taiwan indeed competed with China in Chinese language promotion even though Taiwan is in a disadvantageous place.⁵⁹ Both Taiwan and China re-Sinicize overseas Chinese populations through supporting education and cultural activities.⁶⁰

The macro-level analysis elaborates on the motivations behind the establishment of CIs and examines the reason for CIs' imbalanced distribution and uneven effects in different countries and regions. But the macro level cannot indicate the CI relations with soft power which requires the micro-level analysis on the operation of individual CIs.

3.2. The micro-level analysis

Similar to other language institutes such as the British Council and Alliance Française, CIs have a mission to promote language and culture. Meanwhile, a CI is required by *Hanban* to offer a series of services, which include providing consultancy services for studying in China and commercial information regarding China, giving regular lectures, offering in-person experience with the Chinese culture organizing HSK and training Chinese language instructors. However, CIs have difficulty in realizing the government's goal of promoting soft power because of three reasons: difference in goals between the Chinese

⁵¹*Hanyu guoji tuiguang zhanlve yanjiu baogao [Report on the Strategy of Promoting Chinese Language and Culture]*, Research Institute for Chinese Language Popularization of Renmin University of China, available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_467c6d240102e5kl.html (accessed 24 December 2011).

⁵²'Guidelines for establishing Confucius Institutes abroad', (12 June 2006), available at: <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/chn/jyylxsjl/hy/jx/t257515.htm> (accessed 23 November 2011).

⁵³'Constitution and by laws of CI', *Hanban official website*, available at: <http://www.hanban.edu.cn/> (accessed 23 November 2011).

⁵⁴Lai, 'China's cultural diplomacy', p. 91.

⁵⁵Interview with CI director, May 2011, Japan.

⁵⁶Mandarin Chinese learning centers', Ministry of Education, Taiwan, available at: <http://english.moe.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=14462&CtNode=11424&mp=1> (accessed 20 December 2015).

⁵⁷Aries Poon, 'Soft power smackdown! Confucius Institutes vs. Taiwan Academy', *The Wall Street Journal*, (12 August 2011), available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/08/12/soft-power-smackdown-confucius-institute-vs-taiwan-academy/> (accessed 21 December 2011).

⁵⁸Paul S. Rockower, 'Projecting Taiwan: Taiwan's public diplomacy outreach', *Issue & Studies* 47(1), (2011), pp. 107–152.

⁵⁹Interview with scholars at Taiwan Normal University, July 2011, Taiwan.

⁶⁰Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation*.

government and CIs in foreign countries; the use of hard power; and the practical problems of CI in representing China's soft power.

3.2.1. *Difference in goals between the Chinese government and CIs in foreign countries.*

There is a difference in goals between the Chinese government and CIs in foreign countries. As stated in the Law and Constitution, CIs serve to build a 'harmonious world' and promote 'multiculturalism',⁶¹ which follows the current foreign policy line of China. However, these ambitious political goals are not mentioned in the missions of CIs in foreign countries at all. For example, none of the CIs in Japan mention having a mission of constructing a harmonious world. None of the CIs the author visited in the UK or the US hold this mission to project the image of China's peaceful rise.⁶² In most cases, CIs have different goals, aiming to improve their academic reputation, internationalize their higher education and cultivate competitive talents that are good at foreign languages. Directors at CIs hope that more local people can learn the Chinese language and become familiar with China in order to facilitate various engagements with China.⁶³ The mastery of Chinese language is seen as an indispensable tool for understanding China, conducting commerce and business transactions, and landing a good and new career for people around the world.⁶⁴ As *Hanban* gives full autonomy to CIs to manage CI programs independently, the host institutes would primarily build a positive relationship of the CIs with their societies instead of promoting China's preferred image and soft power. This goes against Beijing's objectives.

3.2.2. *The use of hard power.*

To measure power resources and power behavior according to Nye's power scope, CIs in many aspects are operated by the use of hard power, which includes payments, inducements and bribes. This is reflected in the financial support and various resources provided by *Hanban*. CIs' partnerships came into being during a time when many foreign institutes were encountering a financial crisis and sharply reduced budgets for opening Chinese language programs.⁶⁵ The free resources (such as the initiative fund and at least a five-year financial commitment, teaching resources, Chinese teachers etc.) provided by *Hanban* drove many foreign institutes to partner with CIs. In particular, less famous foreign institutes are more interested in establishing CIs because they can obtain funding from *Hanban* and their partnership with CIs helps enhance their reputations in China.⁶⁶ However, the financial support from *Hanban* has imposed some pressure on the management and operation of CIs. As a director of one CI said, 'since we receive the funding from *Hanban*, we will not do any unfavorable things that will harm China's national interest'.⁶⁷ Financial aid 'is by itself a component of economic power and an element of hard power'.⁶⁸ Besides, the official guidelines of CIs abroad state that 'the overseas CIs must abide by the One-China Policy, preserve the independence and unity of the PRC, and refrain from participating in any political, religious or ethnic activities in the country where they are located'.⁶⁹ This implies that partner institutes are requested not to become involved in any sensitive issues such as Taiwan or Tibet that Beijing finds unacceptable⁷⁰ as it has been stated that a 'CI shall not contravene concerning

⁶¹'Constitution and by-laws of CI', *Hanban Official Website*, available at: http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm (accessed 13 January 2012).

⁶²Interview with CI directors, June 2010, US; interview with CI directors, September 2011, UK.

⁶³Interview with CI director, November 2011, Japan.

⁶⁴Lai, 'China's cultural diplomacy', p. 91.

⁶⁵Muriel M. Zhou, *School-University Partnerships in Teaching the Mandarin Chinese Language: The Confucius Institutes Experiences*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2011, pp. 15–27.

⁶⁶Interview with *Hanban* official, September 2011, Japan.

⁶⁷Interview with CI directors, November 2011, Japan.

⁶⁸Marissa Benavides, 'When soft power is too soft: Confucius Institutes' nebulous role in China's soft power initiative', *The Yale Review of International Studies* 2(2), (2012). pp. 22–35.

⁶⁹Guidelines for establishing Confucius Institutes abroad', (12 June 2006), available at: <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/chn/jyylxsl/hy/jx/t257515.htm> (accessed 13 June 2013).

⁷⁰Daniel Golden, 'China says no talking Tibet as Confucius funds US universities', *Bloomberg*, (2 November 2011), available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-11-01/china-says-no-talking-tibet-as-confucius-funds-u-s-universities> (accessed 15 December 2011).

the laws and regulations of China.⁷¹ In addition, China takes advantage of an 'invisible bribe' in this CI project. Each CI is administered by two directors with one from the Chinese institute and the other from the foreign side. A majority of foreign directors are so-called 'Chinese hands' who either have rich experience in China or know a great deal about China. They clearly understand what the bottom line is for Beijing. The Chinese government has used these interpersonal bribes, namely *guanxi*, to protect its interests.⁷² This runs counter to the nature of soft power which functions as a power of attraction for others to follow and works in a very passive and inherent way.

3.2.3. Practical problems for CIs to represent China's soft power.

CIs encounter a number of practical problems in their endeavor to promote Chinese soft power. Focusing on language teaching, how the CI conveys Chinese values to the rest of the world remains unknown. CIs want to promote the Confucius ideologies of peacefulness and harmony overseas, yet it is different from China's official ideologies and political values. Xu Lin, the director of a CI, said that

the current activities in CIs are presentational. What kind of Chinese value it can communicate to the rest of the world remains unclear. How to make its audiences or students understand China's values and the quintessence of Chinese culture is a challenging task for CIs.⁷³

As the vanguard agency, *Hanban* only favors the expansion of CIs overseas rather than managing CI programs or evaluating the performance of CIs.⁷⁴ Besides, the Ministry of Education makes little effort to coordinate with other agencies which are also in charge of other Chinese language institutes. For example, Sino-Japan institutes *nichu gakuin* are run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and overseas Chinese schools are affiliated with the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs (*qiaoban*). The goals and missions of these institutes, to a large extent, overlap with those of CIs. The coexistence of these Chinese language institutes creates unnecessary competition and is a waste of resources. Also, encouraged by the policy of internationalization of higher education, Chinese institutes are competing with each other in contracting more CIs with foreign partners. Lastly, at a practical level, there are complaints about the poor quality of language teaching provided by the dispatched Chinese instructors. And there are some cases in which the teaching materials provided by *Hanban* are rejected by some foreign institutes due to political or ideological reasons.⁷⁵

4. Controversies and concerns over CIs: an instrument of China's soft power?

CIs have been successfully settled in foreign countries and *Hanban* aims to spread them to every corner of the world in an attempt to promote Chinese language and culture. It is not an exaggeration to say that CIs have made positive impacts on some countries and regions through cultivating favorable views towards China and welcoming China's rise. Meanwhile, they have stirred up various critics and concerns around the world. A number of established foreign institutes oppose joining the network of CIs because educational institutes in many foreign countries want to maintain their own democracy, freedom of the press and freedom of speech. While appreciating the funds and various resources provided by *Hanban*, the concern of foreign institutes is about the threat of CIs to the integrity of the school curriculum, local communities and children's minds. Foreign institutes do not want to follow the rules of CIs and avoid touching upon Beijing's sensitive topics.⁷⁶ In the US, the influence of CIs is not in direct proportion to its prominent number and dramatic growth. Attitude towards CIs is mixed with interests and concerns.

⁷¹ 'Constitutions and by-laws of CI', *Hanban Official Website*.

⁷² Interview with CI directors in May 2010, Japan, September 2011, UK and June 2010, US.

⁷³ Kongzixueyuan de jiaoyuxue, xulin tan zhonghua wenhua zouchuqu' ['Teaching and learning of Confucius Institute, interview with Xulin on the Go-out of Chinese Culture'], (11 November 2011), available at: http://www.hanban.edu.cn/article/2011-11/11/content_378555.htm (accessed 23 December 2011).

⁷⁴ Interview with CI directors, November 2011, Japan.

⁷⁵ Interview with CI director, June 2010, US.

⁷⁶ Justin Norrie, 'Confucius says school's in, but don't mention democracy', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (20 February 2011), available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/confucius-says-schools-in-but-dont-mention-democracy-20110219-1b09x.html> (accessed 25 December 2011).

Residents in a suburban region of Los Angeles opposed the establishment of CIs because of the historical tension between residents and recent Chinese immigrants.⁷⁷ In May 2012, the US State Department issued a new policy directive over the legitimacy of the visas held by CI teachers, giving rise to concerns about the CIs' ability to continue operating in the country.⁷⁸ Professors and administrators at the University of Chicago and Pennsylvania State University have opposed the establishment of CIs, owing to concerns over potential CI interference with academic freedom, or pressure to censor topics that the Communist Party of China finds objectionable. That was why the universities decided to suspend negotiations for the renewal of the agreement for a second term of the CI.⁷⁹ In Canada, some argued that CIs are linked to Chinese intelligence services which are interested in industrial information and intellectual property, and the identities of expatriates involved in activities the Chinese government regards as illegal.⁸⁰ The *National Post* ran a front page headline asking 'Are Chinese language centers in Canada culture clubs or spy outposts?'⁸¹ Recently, the Canadian Association of University Teachers demanded to end the agreement with *Hanban*. In Europe, Stockholm's Institute for Security and Policy describes CIs as China's 'image management project' and the purpose of a CI is to expand Chinese culture as well as reducing the China threat in the international community.⁸² In the UK, Christopher Hughes, Professor of International Relations at the LSE and an expert on China, attacked the school for accepting money from the Chinese government to fund the CI there and accused the CI of being Beijing's 'propaganda arm'.⁸³ In Asia, the situation of CIs is not getting better. All the established CIs in Japan are in partnership with private institutes. More prestigious national institutes in Japan decline to cooperate with *Hanban* and are concerned with CIs' ideological and cultural threat. In a country where Confucianism exerted tremendous influence in history, people doubt that this must be a Chinese government-run project. The government of India rejected the idea of CIs and called them 'a Chinese design of spreading soft power, widening influence by using culture as a propaganda tool'.⁸⁴ That is why the government slowed down the establishment of CIs in India, with zero growth from the first two CIs established in 2007 to the end of 2013. The number of CIs in many Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines (1), Myanmar (3), Malaysia (1), Vietnam (1) and Laos (1) increased quite slowly. The establishment of CIs in Indonesia and Vietnam experienced fierce debate due to the governments' concern about CIs' religious implications. In fact, China's aggressive cultural initiatives have triggered another version of the 'China threat';⁸⁵ people in those countries are mainly attracted by China's 'economic opportunity'.⁸⁶

It is safe to say that CIs' success is due to China's economic prospects as well as pluralistic societies in foreign countries which are inclusive to heterogeneous languages and cultures. But this does not mean that CIs are effective in promoting China's soft power. On the contrary, CIs can hardly fit into soft power because the above

⁷⁷J. Adleman, 'Chinese government classroom grant divides S. Calif. community suspicious of motivation', *Associated Press*, (24 April 2010), available at: <http://education.gaeatimes.com/2010/04/24/chinese-government-classroom-grant-divides-s-calif-community-suspicious-of-motivation-2847/> (accessed 26 December 2011).

⁷⁸Cheng Yingqi, 'US targets Confucius Institutes over visas', *China Daily*, (25 May 2012), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-05/25/content_15382529.htm (accessed 11 July 2012).

⁷⁹Peter Schmidt, 'University of Chicago's plans for Milton Friedman Institute stir outrage on the faculty', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (1 June 2010), available at: <http://chronicle.com/article/U-of-Chicagos-Plans-for/65737/> (accessed 25 December 2011); 'Statement on the Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago', *UchicagoNews*, (25 September 2014), available at: <http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2014/09/25/statement-confucius-institute-university-chicago> (accessed 20 October 2015).

⁸⁰Canadian Association of University Teachers: universities and colleges urged to end ties with Confucius Institute', (17 December 2013), available at: <http://www.caut.news/> (accessed 13 January 2014).

⁸¹Adam McDowell, 'Are Chinese language centers in Canada culture clubs or spy outposts?', *National Post*, (9 July 2010), available at: www.nationalpost.com/news/Chinese+language+centres+culture+clubs+outposts/3258936/story.html#ixzz8xzdXWT4 (accessed 15 January 2012).

⁸²Starr, 'Chinese language education in Europe', pp. 65–82.

⁸³Richard Kerbj, 'Beijing cash threatens to plunge LSE into new donations scandal', *The Sunday Times*, (20 May 2012), available at: http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Education/article1042500.ece (accessed 12 July 2012).

⁸⁴Shobhan Saxena, 'How to be a cultural superpower', *The Times of India*, (22 November 2009), available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/deep-focus/How-to-be-a-cultural-superpower/articleshow/5256363.cms?> (accessed 13 November 2011).

⁸⁵Erich Follath, 'The dragon's embrace: China's soft power is a threat to the West', *Der Spiegel*, (28 July 2010), available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/chinas-soft-power-threat-united-states/story?id=11277294> (accessed 23 December 2011); Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*.

⁸⁶Consultation with professor from the Philippines, May 2012, Japan.

analysis indicates that CIs only promote Beijing's narrow national interests and use culture as a disguise to cover its use of hard power. Beijing is not using CIs to promote soft power. The macro-level analysis shows that CIs are used by the Chinese government to fulfill multiple goals which have political and economic implications in the long run. Meanwhile, the micro-level analysis shows that the operation of CIs contains a considerable number of hard power elements, which include 'inducements', 'payments' and 'bribes'. CIs, touted by government officials as a channel of cultural influence that would contribute to national soft power, are not so 'soft'. This argument can be further reinforced by the worldwide controversies and concerns elicited by the establishment of CIs. Chinese soft power is not so attractive in the eyes of the receivers. Therefore, CIs are unable to achieve the 'harmonious world' it aimed for. The number of CIs appears to have no significant impact on the perceptions of Western countries such as the US, Britain, France, Germany and Japan where the establishment of CIs has been emphasized. An image survey indicated that China's intensified cultural diplomacy did not appear to be accompanied by its steady rise in popularity worldwide.⁸⁷ Some scholars argue that in fact there are few liberal democracies that have acknowledged China's soft power although it was appreciated by some developing countries.⁸⁸

5. Conclusion: problems and prospects of China's soft power

China is now making deliberate efforts to incorporate soft power into its foreign policy. Chinese leaders and government officials are increasingly concerned with promoting soft power in order to change the perception that China is a threat, promote the image of a peaceful rise and build a more complete 'Chinese dream' which is not only in economic and political terms but increasingly along a cultural dimension. As the global influence of China grows, the discussion of soft power among Chinese government officials has become fiercer and ways to promote Chinese culture abroad have become more extensive. But there are flaws and defects that impede China's endeavors to boost its soft power. A variety of cultural initiatives exemplified by the case of establishing CIs reflect China's diverse interests and multiple orientations in foreign policy objectives which could not be achieved by the imbalanced soft power resources. China advocated the concept of soft power coined by Nye but interpreted the term in different ways. While Nye or the West in general regards political values as the most important source of soft power, China regards culture, especially traditional culture, as the most important source of soft power and has placed disproportionate emphasis on cultural promotion. Soft power can broadly include an open society, charismatic leadership, successful economy, developmental experience, diverse sub-cultures and common values shared with the rest of the world. China has yet to offer new cultural values and products other than its traditional culture. This limits China's capability to enhance soft power in a different way. And, in theory, China has incorporated the cultural efforts into soft power, yet they operated them in a 'hard power' way with little differences from the CCP's propaganda work or external publicity. The stated goal of those government-run programs is to convey the benign intention of China's rise to the international system, yet the aggressive outreach of CIs and the 'Great Leap Forward'-style cultural promotion has led to worldwide criticism. China's soft power is and will be constrained by controversies over its poor record of respecting political and social rights; over a lack of political transparency, rule of law, and independence of the media and artists; and over moral decay.⁸⁹ The rest of the world cannot accept China's soft power when Beijing is unwilling to act along with the universal values. Soft power

should be in the eyes of the receivers and emerges from how outsiders perceive a country's values and systems from its inward society rather than being promoted actively by a powerful state in the hope of creating a preferred image and seeking political acceptance.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Men Honghua and Zhou Houhu, 'Zhongguo guojia xingxiang de jiangou jiqi chuanbotujing' ['China's national image: its construction and communication'], in Honghua Men, ed., *Zhongguo zhanlve baogao* [Chinese Journal of Strategic Studies] (Beijing: Remin Chubanshe, 2013), pp. 245–261.

⁸⁸Tao Xie and Benjamin I. Page, 'What affects China's national image? A cross-national study of public opinion', *Journal of Contemporary China* 22(83), (2013), pp. 850–867.

⁸⁹Lai, 'China's cultural diplomacy', pp. 83–102.

⁹⁰Shaun Breslin, 'The soft notion of China's soft power', *Asian Program Paper* 8, (2011), available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/0211pp_breslin.pdf (accessed 18 October 2015).

To conclude, although China has acknowledged the importance of culture for national soft power and made intensified efforts to project soft power, a comprehensive analysis on the establishment of CIs manifests that what China promotes through CIs stays away from soft power. Given the obstacles standing in the way, China needs to reconsider the concept of soft power and update its practical model with care to the international context. If China only uses soft power to pursue its national interests rather than providing public goods and shared values, it will become a form of coercion and enforcement.⁹¹ Most importantly, if China cannot figure out what kind of Chinese core values CIs aim to offer, foreigners will continue to formulate their own perceptions of China regardless of the CIs' efforts. To Beijing's profound dismay, China's soft power will not be enhanced through the establishment of CIs.

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⁹¹*Ibid.*